

# RICA Shipper's Council:

Industry Feedback & Railroad Engagement Summary

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# The Shipper's Council Formation & Inclusion

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## **PURPOSE:**

- Create a structured way for shippers to share operational feedback
- Identify common challenges impacting dimensional/project cargo movements by rail
- Engage directly with Class I railroads on practical improvements
- Foster collaboration between railroads, manufacturers, ports, and logistics providers
- Continue evolving RICA into a year-round industry resource—not just an annual conference

**KEY GOAL:** Provide a unified source of industry feedback and collaboration between stakeholders

## **PARTICIPATING COMPANIES:**

- **Manufacturers:** *Alstom Power, GE Vernova, HICO USA, Hitachi Energy, John Cockerill, Mitsubishi Power, Prolec - GE Waukesha, Siemens Energy*
- **Logistics Service Providers:** *BNSF Logistics, Fracht Group, HLI Rail & Rigging, Luminary Logistics Solutions, SRT Transport Solutions, UTC*

# The Council Process

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## **STRUCTURED ENGAGEMENT PROCESS**

- Email Introduction & Invitation
- Email Survey to Council Participants
- Survey Analysis
- Virtual Council Meeting to Discuss Survey Results
- Individual Railroad Engagement Meetings
- Feedback Compilation
- Presentation of Initial Findings @ RICA Conference

**APPROACH:** The goal was to focus on recurring operational themes; not project-by-project complaints.

# Core Themes From Survey & Council Discussion

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## **OPERATIONAL & PROCESS CHALLENGES**

- Clearance turnaround and predictability
- Railcar availability
- Siding/team-track approvals
- Infrastructure constraints

## **COMMUNICATION & VISIBILITY**

- Shipment visibility
- Escalation paths
- Early-stage planning communication

## **POLICY & CONSISTENCY**

- Standardization across Class I carriers
- Car-ordering rules and processes

## **TECHNOLOGY & MODERNIZATION**

- Digital clearance tools
- Laser measuring
- Automated feasibility tools

# Council Priority Areas

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## **AGREED PRIORITY TOPICS**

1. Railcar equipment availability
2. Clearance response times and predictability
3. Siding identification and approval
4. Railcar ordering rule consistency
5. Rail network clearance education and updates

## **ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION TOPICS**

- Railroads separating idlers from loads
- Marketing team understanding of dimensional freight
- Impact recorder modernization

# Railroad Engagement

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## **THE SERVICE COMMITTEE MET WITH ALL CLASS 1 RAILROADS TO DISCUSS:**

- Survey Feedback
- Current Constraints
- Operational Realities
- Initiatives Underway
- Opportunities for collaboration
- Future Process Improvements

**DISCUSSION FOCUS** Constructive collaboration and long-term industry growth

# Railroad Feedback: Railcar Equipment Availability

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## COMMON THEMES

- Growing demand and backlog pressures across the industry
- Heavy-duty fleet constraints continue to impact planning and execution
- Railroads and railcar providers are exploring ways to improve forecasting, visibility, and fleet utilization
- Some carriers are positioning empties closer to high-volume regions to improve cycle times
- Railroads expressed interest in improved manufacturer forecasting to better communicate future fleet needs

## INDUSTRY DISCUSSION POINTS

- Availability challenges remain difficult to predict consistently
- Last-minute railcar substitutions continue to impact execution and clearance timing
- Long-term equipment investment and forecasting remain critical topics for the industry

# Railroad Feedback: Clearance Response Times & Predictability

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## COMMON THEMES

- Clearance timing varies significantly depending on route complexity, weight, infrastructure restrictions, and the number of carriers involved
- Multi-carrier and shortline coordination remains a major driver of extended review timelines
- Railroads acknowledged the need for improved responsiveness and better predictability
- Several carriers noted ongoing internal efforts around staffing, process improvements, and system upgrades

## SHARED CHALLENGES

- Railcar substitutions restarting portions of the clearance review process
- Increasing quantity and complexity of dimensional shipments along with infrastructure constraints
- Balancing review accuracy with speed and resource availability

**DISCUSSION FOCUS** Improved visibility and predictability are just as important as faster turnaround times.

# Railroad Feedback: Siding Identification & Approval

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## COMMON THEMES

- Earlier siding/offload planning can significantly reduce delays later in the project lifecycle
- Approval processes often involve multiple departments, agreements, and operational review
- Railroads are evaluating ways to simplify or improve siding and team-track approval workflows
- There was interest in exploring more self-service tools and clearer guidance for customers

**DISCUSSION FOCUS** Clearer processes and earlier collaboration create better project outcomes.

# Railroad Feedback: Railcar Ordering Standardization

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## COMMON THEMES

- Most railroads currently utilize web-based or formalized ordering processes
- Some level of standardization may be achievable, though carrier-specific operational requirements remain a challenge
- Advance planning and accurate order timing remain critical for fleet management
- Railroads expressed interest in identifying and benchmarking best practices across the industry

**INDUSTRY DISCUSSION POINT** Where can process consistency improve while still accounting for carrier-specific operational realities?

# Railroad Feedback: Clearance Education & Industry Understanding

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## COMMON THEMES

- Railroads expressed willingness to continue supporting industry education through RICA and other forums
- Several carriers emphasized the importance of clearer communication, better guidance, and continued dialogue between railroads and shippers
- There was strong agreement that both railroad commercial teams and shipper organizations benefit from a deeper understanding of dimensional freight requirements and constraints
- Operational issues involving buffers/idlers and emergency trackage requests were also discussed as areas needing additional coordination and awareness

## SHARED OPPORTUNITY

- Railroad marketing/commercial teams
- Dimensional and clearance departments
- Shippers, manufacturers, and logistics providers

# THE SHIPPER'S COUNCIL TAKEAWAYS

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## **STRONG ALIGNMENT EXISTS**

- Shippers across industries are experiencing the same operational challenges

## **RAILROADS ARE ENGAGED**

- Railroads were receptive to discussion and shared valuable operational context.

## **SOME CHALLENGES ARE STRUCTURAL**

- Fleet limitations
- Infrastructure constraints
- Staffing and engineering resources
- Cross-departmental complexity

The key to all this is that ***COLLABORATION IS CRITICAL*** as no single stakeholder can solve these challenges independently.

# NEXT STEPS

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## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

- Continue railroad engagement discussions
- Refine and prioritize actionable opportunities
- Expand communication between stakeholders
- Support educational and process-focused initiatives
- Continue and grow annual Shipper's Council process

**LONG-TERM GOAL** Create a more predictable, collaborative, and scalable environment for dimensional freight movements.

# THANK YOU

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## **RICA wants to extend gratitude to:**

- The Shipper's Council Participants
- The Class 1 Railroads
- RICA Service Committee
- RICA Membership

**TOGETHER WE MOVE THE INDUSTRY FORWARD!**